



National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

Testimony by Ebony Miller, Community Coordinator, ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Teams Project, In Support of Senate Bill 652: An Act Concerning Referrals from the Department of Children and Families to the Birth to Three Program

Select Committee on Children

February 14, 2013

Submitted by Ebony P. Miller, MSW – Community Coordinator, ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Teams Project

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, Distinguished Members of the Select Committee on Children:

I am the Community Coordinator for the New Haven Safe Babies Court Team, which is part of the larger Safe Babies Court Teams Project run by ZERO TO THREE, National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families (ZTT). In my role as Community Coordinator, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with New Haven community providers and Sarah Eagan, J.D. and Alexandra Dufresne, J.D. from the Center for Children's Advocacy regarding the importance of Part C Early Intervention screenings and assessments.

In May 2011, the Safe Babies Court Teams Project in New Haven began monitoring Department of Children and Family (DCF) cases where children (ages 0-3) were removed from their homes. It has been my responsibility to refer families monitored by DCF and ZTT to the CT Birth to Three System. One of our project's goals is to identify any developmental delays and ensure appropriate service delivery early and often for these children and their families. Our project data reflects that although 19 of 21 children in the project have had at least a referral and initial telephone screening by Birth to Three, only 29% of those children have received a full in-home assessment or evaluation. Through our cases, we have noted some barriers to in-home evaluations. Relative caregivers may refuse Birth to Three services when contacted by local agencies due to privacy concerns or a lack of understanding of the importance of a developmental screening. Because DCF does not always have legal guardianship of the child, in-home screenings can only be forced with court-orders in cases where developmental delays are obvious.

While this is a systematic barrier that needs to be overcome, another system-level concern is the fact that not all children in the child welfare system receive an in-home developmental screen. ZERO TO THREE believes that infants and toddlers in the child welfare system should all receive in-home developmental screenings for the following reasons:



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- Although relative caregivers and foster parents are sometimes trained about child development, they are not child development experts like the Birth to Three providers. Inaccurate responses to phone screening questions can prevent an in-home evaluation from being conducted and a developmental delay from being discovered.
- Children in the foster care system sometimes change caregivers, meaning the caregiver answering the screening questions may not yet know the child well enough to appropriately judge whether or not their development is typical.
- Infants and toddlers can only speak through their behaviors, which can only be truly judged through in-person interactions and evaluations.

ZERO TO THREE believes that the best way to address the developmental needs of children who have been abused and neglected is through face-to-face evaluations by the experts in the field. That is to say, that not only are automatic referrals necessary, Birth To Three evaluations are recommended because it is extremely important for these infants and toddlers' futures.

Respectfully submitted,

Ebony P. Miller, MSW – Community Coordinator, ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Teams Project